

Public Relations for the Bovine Practitioner

Chandler Meloy, D.V.M.
California Veterinary Medical Association
Morgana, California 94556

Public Relations: (External) Using the total skills of communication to provide information and education to the general public—through media, in personal contact, and with the written or spoken word—and providing training and counsel to DVMs in communication.

A total program uses press, radio, television, magazines, memos, newsletters, reports, photographs, drawings, speeches, and meetings. It must include a philosophy of operation and a standard of excellence for each step you take. Finally, the total program is one of counseling as well as action. (Every action is a solution.)

Tools of public relations are the written or spoken word, the drawing or photograph, the design or colors used, the typewriter or the type-face chosen, and the mode of delivery—from the postage stamp to the telephone. It includes audio visual units such as projectors, slides, charts, blackboards, audio and video cassettes, and the microphone. It includes the letter or the bill.

Impact of public relations is in direct ratio as to how well you use the tools, use your imagination, and meet the deadlines of the outlets you are using.

Acceptance is part of your input: False statements may have impact, but not acceptance. And, even with the best of situations, not everyone wants to accept an idea or a suggestion. It is important to recognize that not one method is the total answer to any difficult or complicated communication problem. Also, even with the best of planning and timing, things can go wrong, either from human error or from other outside influence we cannot control.

Releases: Materials for public release should be prepared to meet media formats and deadlines; it should be neat and easy to read; it should include precise and easy reference for contacts; it should be creative and interesting.

Ethical Standards: Any public relations program must maintain a high standard of professional ethics. Information should be accurate. Statements and paraphrasing must reflect honest views. Opinion must be separated from news. Finally, media should expect and receive truthful answers to legitimate questions.

Columns: The release of information news columns to California newspapers was the first step for CVMA in providing public relations for members. While expensive (and time consuming to control) they are an effective and popular “tool” for many VMAs.

Summary: Keep a sense of humor, enjoy the work of communications, understand the viewpoint of others, be polite, and accept the fact that not only animals are human “but people are too”!

Glossary of Terms: Public Relations “Lingo”

Many expressions or titles used in the area of public relations are confusing to those not in the profession. Here are some modified and simple definitions of some of these terms:

Public Relations - “P.R.”: Combines all aspects of communications and image making with special emphasis on planning and executing specific projects. Counseling. Total approach. Motivation. Political needs. A social science.

Publicity, Press Releases, and Promotion: Informing the public, or your own members, of an event by use of news releases, flyers, pictures, posters, etc.

Release: The article or story that is basic to news. The written account of a program or event.

Press Relations: Contact and communication with members of the press or media (often to provide background information).

Media, and Multi-Media: The combined “public” means of communication—direct mail, newspapers, broadcast stations, magazines, newsletters, billboards, and other published material. Can include the tools of media: cassettes, film projectors, slides—thus MULTI-MEDIA is a *total* presentation.

Press or Press Information: Sometimes confused with public relations. To provide newsworthy information to the media with press releases, feature articles, or verbal contacts.

Public Information Office (Officer): Frequently used by military organizations or government agencies—it is a cross between press information and public relations.

Public Service: Non-commercial announcements, programs, or events in the “public” interest. In broadcasting refers to “commercials” for non-profit or worthy public agencies. Free. Also, the “act” of doing a service.

Periodicals: Usually means published newspapers, magazines, newsletters or other materials—that appear regularly. (Not annual reports.)

Broadcast: Refers to radio and television stations and their programs or announcements.

Community Relations (or Affairs): A term that covers actions and communications between an organization and the public—mostly on a non-profit basis. Sometimes substituted for public relations. Deals with programs and speeches.

Communications: Mechanical (phones, tape recorders) means of transmitting ideas or suggestions OR a procedure of transferring information (speech, newsletter, poster, etc.).

Making That Speech: A Few Simple Tips

Speaking is the most common form of communication—yet the one we least practice. In addition to the formal talk or lecture, speaking includes giving instructions, talking on the phone, and making a motion at a meeting. In each case we hope to motivate or inform. How well we do, depends on our preparation and on how much we care about our audience.

Preparing The Speech: 1. Give yourself time to prepare. 2. Do it in a quiet place. 3. Write out your speech (if you want) but start with an outline. 4. Practice by reading out loud. 5. Or use a tape recorder. 6. Or ad-lib your speech from your outline.

Research and Topics: 7. Give your speech an interesting title. Keep it short. 8. Get background material together BEFORE you plan your speech. 9. Translate medical terms to lay language for understanding. 10. Talk about subjects you know—your strongest topics are from veterinary medicine. 11. Make sure your facts ARE ACCURATE. 12. Use quotes or statistics to add strength to your topics.

Outline Your Speech: 13. The first step is to outline your speech listing key subjects: 14. Good speeches include: a) Introduction of topic; b) List of problem areas; c) Difficulties of topic; d) Possible solutions; e) Conclusion—positive. 15. Most speeches run too long. Don't be afraid to cut material. 16. Speakers tell their audience what they are going to say, then they say it, and then they say what they said.

Delivery and Timing: 17. Speak clearly - make sure everyone can hear you. 18. Check your speaking area BEFORE you speak when possible. Get the feel of the room. 19. The standard speech is about 25 minutes plus questions. The hardest is five minutes. The easiest is two hours. 20. Respect your audience. Know THEIR organization by name. 21. Speak to your audience, not yourself or your paper.

Appearance: 22. Dress neatly. However, don't be afraid of colorful dress or casual clothes. 23. Wear a tie before formal groups or public agencies. 24. SMILE!

Tools of Speech: 25. You may use a projector, mike, or recording. KNOW HOW to use them. KNOW where the plugs are. Have an extra bulb for projector. 26. Use folders or leaflets to supplement your talk. (Audience can pick them up on their way out.) 27. Encourage questions. This is when you can get audience reaction AND ANSWER IT. 28. Type your speeches. 29. SMILE! 30. And relax. It's better than you think!

Keep it simple! Make it short! Speak loud enough to be heard! Be honest.

Projects That Auxiliaries Can Do to Help VMAs

Here is a representative sample of projects and programs that an auxiliary can utilize to assist VMAs in furthering the profession of veterinary medicine.

Only one or two might apply to some chapters—while others might be able to handle more. Some ideas:

1. Form a political committee: Projects for this committee include: Attending local governmental meetings; planning coffee hours for political leaders; holding receptions for elected public officials; sponsoring political seminars for veterinarians and other professionals.

2. Establish an information/speakers committee: Make pamphlets and information folders (e.g.: Spay me) available in the community at meetings and schools; form a speakers committee to make presentations at local clubs and schools; offer to handle organizational activities of a VMA speakers bureau; find out what people in the community would like to know about and prepare an informational folder.

3. Set up a convention committee: This would provide a means of serving at conventions, meetings and county fairs with an information table and display to be serviced by the auxiliary; they could design a booth for use at fairs and meetings; they could assist at state conventions by providing volunteer staff for special booths (such as Academy of Veterinary Medicine).

4. Have a clip committee: Each member would clip one local paper per month, cutting out all articles on veterinary medicine, animals and allied subjects. (These are useful PR tools when trying to find out how local editors feel about the profession.)

5. Newspapers committee: To contact editors, both daily and weekly; to see if they will run regular articles about veterinary medicine; to prepare simple press releases on local VMA meetings on a regular basis; to monitor papers for articles they are running that are negative and provide answers to them; to write letters to the editors on a regular basis on issues that affect the profession.

6. Radio committee: To contact radio stations to run public service announcements on the air; to call in on radio talk shows with comments about animal care and health; to provide a committee that could produce a local radio show on veterinary medicine (administrative committees handle phone calls, letters and record keeping).

7. Television committee: To contact local TV stations and ask them to run public service films on veterinary medicine; to provide committee support to VMAs who might want to have weekly TV shows on veterinary medicine; to monitor local TV for animal stories.

8. Special day committee: To plan on a community day (or week) that salutes animals and medical health care; displays in store windows; lectures at schools; proclamation by the mayor saluting animals; special radio and television shows; tours of hospitals and clinics: tours of the local pound (this could be an annual event).

9. Honors committee: Establish an "investigating committee" that would search for examples of service to the animal health sciences—this could be the local paper running animal health columns, a public service by a DVM who saved the life of a pet goat—and then at an appropriate meeting they could be honored with a plaque or certificate.

The TV Program and Announcements

Television dominates the lives of most people today. It is flexible, colorful and an exciting force in our society. It also needs tremendous input to keep schedules going hour after hour and day after day. And, like radio, it needs public service material to meet FCC obligations for community service—a provision most stations are happy to provide.

Here are some basic suggestions for television input on the local level:

Announcements: These are public service “commercials” that are scheduled and prepared much as with advertisers. In most cases they reflect modest budgets (if any) but frequently are very creative.

Thirty seconds: Basic length. Can be on film, on video tape or used with an announcer reading the message with a slide (several slides in some cases) on the screen.

Sixty seconds: Usually film or video tape. Especially effective in non-prime time hours such as late movies or weekend afternoons.

Ten seconds: Usually “copy” with a slide. Quick announcements.

Local stations will accept “messages” on a public service subject. They will sometimes ask you to come to the studio and make a video tape of your message.

Programs: There are two basic programs that concern the local organization—the regular news program and the public service program.

News: Usually this will concern an “event” that is happening in the local area and the station sends out a camera crew to film the event (ribbon cutting, opening a new hospital, rabies clinic).

Sometimes we can suggest a “feature” to the local station—such as the filming of an operation—that they will use on a regular newscast.

Public Service: The public service program can be produced by the station (usually one time only) on a specific subject—e.g.: veterinary medicine today, animal overpopulation, etc., or by an outside group on a regular basis, such as a weekday.

This second choice, produced by an outside agency is an excellent method of communication.

The CVMA office can provide an outline of procedures in planning such a series. They are especially effective on local CABLE stations. The key to success is a good “organizing committee” which often can be handled by an auxiliary or PR committee.

Client Public Relations

Good client relations reflect in annual statements. There are many approaches to meeting the public, and serving them, but some things are basic.

We have noted a few of the more common procedures (or tips) that apply to any organization, but most specifically to veterinary clinics and hospitals. These are as basic to “public relations” as any news story or magazine article will ever be.

1. Dollars and sense: We must collect fees to stay in business, but our business is not collecting fees.

2. Staff: Everyone is on the staff, and they all share in the “operation.” (That does not mean just surgery.)

3. Facilities: That is a lay term for the warm, clean, neat and happy place you work. We sometimes call it a clinic or hospital.

4. Service: We all serve each other sometimes, somewhere. And, we all appreciate service FROM OTHERS.

5. Smile: Along with thank you (and please) this expression is the mother’s milk of PUBLIC RELATIONS.

6. Public Relations: These are relations you have in public—you may want to approach the client in a more formal manner than at home.

7. Phone: An invention that has a hold button, and ear piece, and a mouth piece. What POWER you have!

8. Waiting Room: A place to wait, and watch, and wait. This should not resemble the holding cell of a prison camp.

9. Waiting: One of the pleasures taught service men during the war. It is done in rooms, on the phone, and as recreation.

10. Correspondence: Letters, bills, notes and flyers are parts of this communication system. It was much simpler before papyrus.

11. Emergency: An unimportant condition affecting nervous people at midnight and not worth our concern.

12. Diffidence: A heavy word. Used by bankers and collectors in the Mafia. Not to be confused with attitude.

13. Fees and Prices: A fair and proper way to conclude our mutual activities.

5-C’S Plan: Courteous, cool, concise, clear, competent.

Controversy

Controversial subjects face us every day—either in our personal lives or as citizens. Much of this leads to anger—white-hot anger—and we turn (in frustration) to SIMPLE answers.

Here is a baker’s dozen of points to consider when you get involved in controversy. The “public view” is shown first and is followed by “your view?” on the following line. Only one of the two represents the correct procedure. Take YOUR pick!!

1. Two Sides?

There is my side—and the wrong side.

2. Preparation?

This is a waste of time . . . only for amateurs.

3. Audience?

All audiences are against me . . . so I don’t have any respect for them.

4. Coolness?

Being “cool as a cat” is fine if you live in the jungle—I believe in being angry as a mother tiger with cubs.

5. Alternatives?

There are no alternatives to my view—my ABC plan

is: a) I will not compromise. b) I will not substitute. c) I will not listen.

6. Sears Plan?

I know that Sears has the choice of good, better and best. But I can't afford the best no matter how cheap it is.

7. Losing?

Why is everyone picking on me (sob!). I just started getting involved in public affairs.

8. Solutions?

For who(m)? It was no solution for me.

9. Logic?

Not me, you don't. I'm not going to be trapped by one of those foreign words.

10. Reason?

You know the old saying—two reasonable men are on a fool's errand.

11. Who cares?

Do you know how long it took me to learn everything I know?

12. Spay me not!

That's a statement, folks, not a verb!

13. Humor?

Life is too serious to laugh about, St. Peter!

The Press Release: At the Local Level

The press release can be an effective means of communication with the public—sometimes even with members of your association.

And they are welcomed by the newspapers as they make "grist" for their mill—that of providing news to the public.

However, to get the best results from your release, and the best chance to get the story in the paper (many others are sending in releases too) there are some simple rules that will help:

1. Typewriter: All releases should be typewritten, double spaced, indented paragraphs, and in standard (pica) type styles. (No italics for example.) Use only one side of each page. Standard white typing paper, 8-½ x 11.

2. Space: Leave enough space at the top and bottom of each page to prevent bunching or crowding.

3. Heading: In single space, in the upper left hand corner of your first page, type the name of your organization, the address of your organization (or chief officer) and the city and zip. Skip one line and add the word CONTACT: Put your name and phone number on this line.

In the right corner put a statement of time: For immediate release. For (date) release. Add the date of release below this line.

4. Headline: A brief listing of the subject of your news release is often useful. It should be in capital letters and centered at the top of the article. Leave enough space between the headline and the article to follow. Be brief (cancer specialist to speak to veterinarians; local veterinarians elect officers; etc.)

5. Story: The first paragraph should describe in simple and short sentences what is going on. An old

formula says that you should include: What - Why - When and Where.

6. Length: Most announcements, notices of special meetings, election of officers and subjects (like rabies clinics) should be short and to the point. Two pages at the most—one page if possible. For feature articles, or special stories on a medical topic, they can be longer.

7. Page Two: If you do have to have a second or third page, add (more) or (continued) to the first page at the bottom (centered). Start the second page with a number (Page 2) and add to the same line the subject (e.g.: Election) and the date of the release. End all articles by using the word (end) or an -00-.

8. Delivery: Hand deliver if possible, but if not, mail in plenty of time for the deadline. Note carefully weekly newspapers—when they must have copy.

9. Pictures: If you have them, great. Clear, uncluttered plain backgrounds. Subjects should be neat. 5 x 7 or 8 x 10.

10. Public service committee: To maintain a record of the many public service contributions of veterinarians in their communities. This would apply to taking care of stray or exotic animals; serving the elderly with special assistance; giving medical aid to a hero dog; serving on a community committee (such as Animal Health Committees).

11. Seminar committee: Sponsor educational seminars for the auxiliary (e.g.: Public Relations Seminar) or for the community (e.g.: Public Relations Seminar for all women's organizations); seminar on "The Waiting Room" or on the "Importance of Lay Help to the Profession."

12. Add-an-idea-yourself: Make suggestions to your executive committee—what can be done—Distribute first aid charts to community? Sell tickets to a circus to raise money for scholarships? Buy a kidney machine for the local hospital? Have a veterinary picnic? Write a book about "funny" stories in animal medicine? Make a coloring book of animal ABC's of pet care? Have a "doggie dew" day (clean-up day)?

Some Examples of Good Public Relations

Public relations is dealing with the public. We can often suggest programs that will get press reaction (an open house for example) but the *program* is public relations, not the press release.

Here are some samples:

1. Don't keep a client waiting. Smile. Be polite. 2. Serving on a school board or public agency. 3. Holding a "Career Day" in your area. Fair. 4. Appearing before a city council or board of supervisors. 5. Serving as a boy scout leader.

6. Dressing professionally. 7. Keeping a neat hospital, waiting room, parking lot, etc. 8. Giving a good speech before a civic group or a service club. 9. Maintaining high staff quality control (and morale). 10. Holding an open house.

11. Having polite phone manners, not using the "hold button," and returning phone calls in a reasonable time. 12. Showing a veterinary film (e.g.,

Love Means Caring) to a school, civic group, club, or city government. 13. Having the press tour your hospital, your clinic, visit your meetings, or just have coffee with them. 14. Getting brochures, charts and other information "tools" out to the public. Put them in with bills. Use magazines or newspapers as gifts. 15. Having a local legislator tour your hospital, speak at your meeting, etc.

16. Working on a "community project" with other professions or lay groups (such as Animal Health Commission, Ecology Committee, Emergency Committee). 17. Attending CE programs that deal with non-medical subjects. (Speed reading, law, P.R., speech, etc.) 19. Writing a neat letter, well spaced on the page, clean typewriter ribbon. 19. Having an easy sign to show where your hospital is located. 20. Conducting a seminar on animal population control problems, on animal first aid, etc.

Some Examples of Good Press Relations

Some representative areas of good press relations that can be handled by the state association or the local V.M.A.

1. Medical ALERT on specific problem (state). 2. Columns (free medical advice and suggestions) (local). 3. TV appearances of individual (local). 4. Radio appearances of individual (local). 5. Network radio or television interviews (state).

6. General news releases on local subjects such as rabies clinics, election of officers, etc. (local). 7. General news releases on conventions, regional seminars, election of statewide officers, etc. (state). 8. Feature news articles such as interviews (state). 9. Local news features and interviews (local). 10. Special magazine or other medical stories (state). (Note: time-consuming).

11. Letters to the editor (local). 12. Letters to magazines (state). 13. Radio public service announcements (state). 14. Television public service announcements using slides, film or video tape (state). (Note: Expensive and time-consuming). 15. Releases to the veterinary press (such as the AVMA Journal) and lay-oriented press (such as Animal Cavalcade) (state).

16. Background information provided for the media to complete a story or book (state). 17. Photography, either on assignment from the state office, or with commercial photographer (state). 18. Preparation and release of press kits for conventions and seminar meetings (state). (Note: expensive and time-consuming). 19. Press releases for CE programs (state). 20. Preparation of a "general" release that a local association can rewrite for local release (state).

Ten Tips for Bovine Practitioners to Improve Public Relations

1. Prepare a client newsletter (through your local VMA) for quarterly or monthly release. Call it the Herd Health Report.

2. Provide your local newspaper a weekly or monthly health care column with tips and

suggestions on good medicine. (MD's do this as do DDS's and other professional groups.)

3. Ask your local association to have a brochure on veterinary medicine . . . that you give to clients, students, and the public to tell about the profession.

4. Provide a health chart for use of clients. Write California VMA for a sample. Prepare your own to meet local needs.

5. Maintain a strong "public" dress code when appearing before groups and public agencies.

6. Get your local VMA to publicize the public service projects you are involved in (as well as your colleagues). The Heifer Project is a good example.

7. Define goals of your "public relations needs." Don't just use the word or prepare materials if it is not needed. What do you want to accomplish with your "public" relations. Publicity? More clients? Respect? More money? Awareness of your professional skills?

8. Maintain internal public relations by keeping a Bovine Chapter or committee active in your local or state VMA. Ask for bovine space in publications. Pass resolutions that benefit herd owners and ranchers.

9. Keep a list of local political leaders. Know them by name. Ask them to speak at your meetings. Many political leaders have never met a veterinarian. Work on their re-election campaigns.

10. If you need more local or regional exposure in the press and on radio or television, hire a part-time worker to provide your VMA some organized effort to keep information cling to the media. Call on your auxiliary. Ask the 4-H Club to send a journalism student to your VMA. Buy existing films or brochures for community release. (The Covenant, a film produced by AVMA, is a good example.)

Public Relations Concepts

What does public relations mean? Who participates in public relations? How can we afford public relations? Why slogans or themes? What are goals? Who should counsel public relations? Why deadlines? Calendars? Internal vs. external. Are non-medical seminars useful? Do we read memo's?

Goals for Public Relations

News releases? Open house? Special project? Monthly health columns? Logo identification? Radio public service? Health symposium? Informational folders? White glove inspection? Speakers' bureau?

Staff, Finances, Budgets

Three possible ways to go: a. counsel and project staff; b. agency; c. part-time staff.

How to spend money wisely: one color is good . . . two colors are fine . . . four colors are gaudy, neatness is not expensive, don't pay the postman to deliver File 13.

Budget outline (sample \$10,000): printing and design, 50%; postage and delivery, 5%; secretarial/staff, 15%; counsel and guidance, 15%; supplies and papers, 10%; special projects, 5%.